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ABSTRACT

Based on an audience study conducted in London to investigate the educational relevance of the differentiated response of young people 11 to 16 years old to popular culture, this paper discusses: (1) the reason why this and further studies of this type are needed; (2) the main findings of the study with emphasis on the way in which young people's reading and viewing habits and choices may be affected by factors of age, race, and gender, and the differentiated audience response arising from these reading and viewing choices; and (3) the educational relevance of such a response in terms of the impact this might have on educational thinking in general and media education in particular, and the ways in which such responses might inform specific classroom practice. The first section of the paper discusses the need for such research in the context of two basic approaches to the question of media influence, i.e., the "direct effects" model and the "other critical factors" model, and the incomplete picture presented by prior studies on youth and culture. A detailed description of the audience study is presented in the second section, which concentrates on two main questions--that of choice and the possible significance of various patterns of viewing reported by the children, and that of their actual response to specific television programs. The third addresses both the reasons why questions of audience are becoming increasingly important within media education, and the relevance of text/audience interaction for media education. (CGD)

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Paper presented to the 1986 International Television Studies Conference

Popular Culture and Young People: the educational potential of the differentiated audience

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Popular Culture and Young People: the education potential of the differentiated response

Based on an audience study in London with 11 - 16 year olds with particular reference to factors of age, race and gender, this paper will discuss the following points:

a) the reason why this and further studies of this type are needed

b) a summary of the main findings of the study; in particular, the way in which young people's reading and viewing habits and choices may be affected by factors of age, race and gender, and the differentiated audience response arising from those reading and viewing choices

c) the educational relevance of such a response in terms of the impact this might have on educational thinking in general and media education in particular, and the ways in which such responses might inform specific classroom practice

a) The research project which this paper describes - an investigation into the educational relevance of the differentiated response of young people to popular culture with reference to factors of age, race and gender - was born out of 3 specific concerns.

Firstly there was a concern about the influence that the mass media were popularly supposed to have, particularly upon young people, and the way in which this notion of 'direct effects' was and could be utilized,via moral panics for instance, to limit the range and accessibility to some popular cultural artefacts especially those which might not necessarily reflect dominant ideas and practices. I was also concerned that these ideas derived from'common-sense' assumptions were based on little if any relevant or reliable research.

Secondly academic studies within Youth and Cultural Studies which could and should have been able to shed light upon the relationship between young people and popular culture had to a large extent concentrated on distinctive'cult' groups which were invariably white, male and working class. Though illustrative of how specific youth subcultures might make sense of the world, the absence of 'non-cult' youth in particular girls and non-white children suggests that any analysis derived from these studies might be misleading.

Thirdly as a teacher in a multicultural school in London I did not recognize the children I was teaching either from within the 'direct effects' model or from within the studies I refer to above. For this reason I felt that I was professionally inadequately prepared to fully understand the range of issues and concerns which might be most appropriate to a Media Studies course.

(I will develop these points a little further.)

1) <u>The question of Mass Media influence: Two positions</u>

Whilst at one level it seems agreed that the media play an important role in the lives of most people in industrialised society there is less agreement , if indeed any at all, on the extent to which the mass media have any ability to change the fundamental beliefs and behaviour of its audience.

There would appear to be two basic approaches to the question of media influence. The first of these is often known as the 'direct effects' model. This conceives of the text/audience relationship as principally a causal one between product and viewer, a one-way process which has a direct (though not easily measurable) effect on behaviour and attitude unless 'inoculated' against in some way. Implicit in this model is a denigration of popular culture and the values it apparently carries, as well as a sense that its audience, in particular, its child audience is both gullible and in need of some form pf protection. It is interesting to reflect for a moment that the majority of the children I spoke to during my study shared this view although with one significant exception. While believing that others were susceptible to the influence of mass media, the children generally considered that they themselves were immune.

A good example of the widespread acceptance of this model can be seen from the recent Video Nasties episode (or to give it the legislative name the Video Recordings Bill (1984)) Here is an instance where alleged empirical research data is used, where a so-called Parliamentary Group Video Enquiry gave status to call for action and where the press (particularly the Tabloid press) managed to place the issue of the Video Nasty and children firmly on the nation's agenda.

The term 'video nasties' was coined and the debate orchestrated by the press and certain lobbying groups (with a predominantly Christian bias) in much the same way as the term and the debate about the 'mugger' had been conducted in the early 1970s. The similarities are considerable: violence among and to children, by no means a new phenomenon - as street crime is not a street crime- became the temporary focal point for the issue of Law and Order. Rather than on the street with the mugger, particular attention was paid to the home and the twin issues of child corruptibility and parental responsibility.

Let us turn briefly to the history of the issue. On 23rd November 1983 a group calling itself the Parliamentary Group Video Enquiry published a report entitled 'Video Violence and Children'. That it called itself a 'Parliamentary' group at all is highly contentious but more significant was the rapidity with which its call was taken up by the press while the later comments by the report's

researcher about the validity of the findings were not.

The Video Nasties episode is relevant to the present argument for one clear reason. The acceptance of the direct effects model is axiomatic to its success in that the abdication of parental responsibility was seen to be directed related to an apparent moral 'vacuum' in children, and subsequent worries about children were directly related to their having seen particular corrupting films - in other words, the Nasties.

The second approach to the question of mass media influence can be termed the 'other critical factors' model. This argues that the ability of the media to effect changes of belief or of attitude are heavily circumscribed by a number of factors. In my own case, for instance, I do not enter into a direct relationship with, say, a television programme but bring to it a host of attitudes, beliefs and experiences culled from the cultural, socilogical and biographical spheres in which I live. My 'moment of decoding' is in some ways both a direct and indirect experience. Direct in the sense that my responses are immediate to that particular artefact - that I react to tension, suspense and relief of that tension/suspense in an immediate and vicarious way. Indirect in the sense that to understand, say, a police drama I am building on an already established set of specific cultural determinants in which I and the police drama are placed. On the one hand I have experience of that tradition of genre, the expectation of storyline, the other series which are currently 'on offer', the look of a TV police world as well as a notion about the usual length of a police drama programme; on the other hand, my ability to make sense and ultimately to enjoy a programme depends on a set of ideological determinants - such as the specifics of the class to which I belong and the nature of its relationship to the police, its response to the range of issues and discourses around which that particular programme is based as well as my own particular experiences .

Within this model the media must not be seen to be narrowly concerned with a (one-way) communication process in isolation to other factors but in relation to those other factors. Engaging with the mass media is only one of the factors that establish one's ability to understand and make sense of one's place in the world, including one's relationship with the mass media.

2) Youth and Cultural Studies: the incomplete picture

As mentioned on page 1 Youth and Cultural Studies have attempted for the past 20 years to shed more light on the way in which particular sub-groups or sub-cultures make sense of their place within the social structure. Clearly these Studies have been invaluable. They have provided evidence about how and what factors structurally and culturally divide Youth, for instance and the relative importance of such factors - ranging from the ways in which particular sub-cultures attempt to appropriate their own 'space' and meanings to the potential political significance of the various groups.

Notwithstanding the usefulness of these types of studies - particularly for me the transcripts and analyses of transcript which have formed a substantial part of this work - there are many weaknesses and absences in this approach. Much of this work has limited itself to very tight 'subcultural' boundaries whereas in fact many teenagers may never enter these subcultures. Furthermore the studies have concentrated by and large on white working class males. Perhaps this is simply because their presence is more strongly felt and visible (on the streets, in the press and on TV) than 'non-cult' youth such as girls or non-white children.

In fact the only mention of females in many of the studies is via a predominantly 'dirty' sex related humour. In Willis' study (Willis P; 1978; Learning To Labour; Saxon House) for example, the boys within the study either perceive girls as objects to possess or as objects of ridicule and sexual banter. Without questioning the validity of the study itself, in the final analysis such views are not balanced by any indication of how the boys actually interact in family or sexual relationships so that all one has is a view of collective male bravado linked to little else.

Similarly writers such as McRobbie(in Settling Accounts with Subcultures: a Feminist Critique - Screen Education 34 Spring 1980) and Dorm & South (Of Males and Markets: A Critical Reveiw of Youth Culture Theory: Research Paper 1, Middlesex Polytechnic 1984) point out that the vary narrow definitions and parameters

within which studies may take place effectively obscure areas of experience in which females or for that matter non-white children are likely to feature. Thus the concentration on relations outside the home , on wage work and on the market ignore the significance of housework, informal labour or other forms of home-based activities which may be of significance.

The paradigm of subcultural studies is still seriously incomplete not only in terms of absent groups, for instance females, children from ethnic minority groups as well as the vast majority of youth who do not fall into distinctive 'cult' groups but also in terms of absent places, and its neglect of important aspects of adolescent life. This clearly includes the way in which adolescents may engage with the mass media.

The study which I describe below attempts in a very small way to develop our understanding of how young people in various complex social settings make sense of their place within the social structure by concentrating on the significance and the nature of their interaction with the mass media. By including within the study a variety of groups - males, females, and children from a range of ethnic cultures - it is hoped that not only will light be shed on the nature of the text/audience interaction but also that a balance will be regained within Youth and Cultural Studies.

b)

During September and October 1984 I interviewed 24 groups of young people from a London secondary school. The 24 groups were divided into 3 age groups: 1st, 3rd and 5th year with 8 groups of 6 pupils from each year group. (Ist year pupils are aged between 11 and 12, 3rd year 13 to 14 and 5th year 15 to 16) The composition of each year group was as follows: 2 groups were mixed by race and gender and the remaining 6 were divided by race and gender. Thus there was one group of white girls per year group, one group of white boys, one group of Afro-Caribbean girls and another of boys, and similarly two group o Asia children. The school in question had a reasonably balanced intake between 3 main ethnic groups: white (with a significant proportion of children of Irish descent), Afro-Caribbean mainly of second and third generation British born of largely Jamaican parentage, Asian mainly second or third generation British born with a significant minority of Kenyan or

Ugandan Asians.

It is difficult to condense the range and complexity of over 25hours of discussion into a few short pages but in an attempt to be brief I will concentrate on 2 main questions - that of choice and the possible significance of various patterns of viewing which the children claimed, and questions of their actual response to particular TV programmes.

1) Viewing habits and preferences

What I offer here is a brief description of the TV programmes which the children claimed to prefer to watch. I will divide this into 3 sections taking into account factors of age, race and gender.

Questions of ethnic preference

There was some evidence to suggest that programme choice was influenced by ethnic factors. For example, US generated programmes while generally more popular with all children was significantly more popular with non-white children. A further sub-division can be offered: Asian children seemed to prefer a wide variety of US programmes (particularly US soaps) while Afro-Caribbean children had a preference for programmes with a high profile for black characters such as Diff'rent Strokes. Asian children seemed to prefer news/information programming such as Tomorrow's World while white children clearly were drawn to general entertainment programmes like Benny Hill.

It is interesting to note that in their favourite programmes white children opted for Banny Hill and Coronation Street - arguably traditional and all-white fayre from British TV, Asian children preferred the 2 US soaps , Dallas and Dynasty and news programmes and finally Afro-Caribbean children chose programmes such as Diff'rent Strokes and Lenny Henry, virtually the only programmes at the time of the study which featured black actors.

Questions of gender prefernece

Perhaps more than any other category a great deal of TV output, as far as the children were concerned, had a clear gender orien-

tation. Drama programmes (particularly soaps), quiz programmes and music dominated the girls' TV choices with the boys more interested in action/adventure series, sport and news documentary.

Questions of preference by age

The most useful way to describe TV preferences by age through this period is by an increasingly diverse range of programmes accompanied by less enthusiasm for viewing. Their intake becomes less and, in particular, programmes with a exclusively 'young' appeal become less popular, for example CTV programmes. A programme such as Grange Hill which was a clear favourite with a number of 1st year was hardly mentioned by the 15 and 16 year olds.

2) 'Reading' programmes

Though descriptions of statistics are useful in that they provide the parameters within which a topic can be contained, on their own they can do little more than that. Therefore this section attempts to consider the nature of the interaction between text and reader rather than the fact that a specific programme appeared to be enjoyed by a specific section of the viewing public. I will offer 2 brief 'snatches' of my interviews with the children and hope that these will illustrate both the complexity of the audience/text relationship as well as the influence which factors such as race and gender may have upon it.

The A-Team and B.A.Baracus

A great number of the groups mentioned the A-Team and B.A. Baracus . This is not surprising. After all the A-Team was for much of its 1984/85 season the most popular programmes with 10 to 15 year olds in the UK and for the children I spoke to B.A. Baracus was clearly the most popular character within the 'Team'

B.A.Baracus could be seen to have a variety of appeals for children. Is he as the DailyStar (7/10/83,p19) suggests a figure who gives dignity to the myths of slavery? The newspaper quotes the actor as saying:

> 'My hairstyle goes back to the Mandinka tribe in Africa and the jewellery I wear is a symbol of the chains the slaves were forced to wear'.'

Or perhaps as Simon Hoggart suggests that as a white audience seeing a black man automatically in terms of an 'underdog' we are pleased when he comes out on top. Furthermore he asks whether his function is also to exorcise

> 'some white American fear of a mean aggressive black man who might not be on the side of justice. He is TV's first acceptable fantasy mugger'
> (HOggart,The Tale of Mr T,New Society, 19/1/84,.p93)

Certainly he was a hero to most of the children I spoke to, but an unproblematic acceptance of a hero is rather inadequate not to say unhelpful. The children's comments do suggest that their concept of hero and their view of B.A. within that role depended on a number of factors including that of race.

The 5th year Afro-Caribbean boys were quite clear in their admiration for B.A.:

S: Yes he don't take nothing from no one, he's the sort of guy who you can say something to or you'll look at badly and he'll fight you, he's got a quick temper like cos someone or other broke into his house or something

M: Yeah it was in the papers and they got his mum and he had to kill them for it (laughs) that's true, it was in the papers, it happened in America, they mugged his mum and he had to go out for them, you see and when he got them, that was it, you never see them again, and that is why in his...I mean, he's got money but it says in the papers that hisdaughter that he's got, she's got to live how he was brought up, you understand, instead of living in a rich area, sort of thing, she gotta live somewhere different , you know

L: He's the big...he's the gentle giant

TB: Is he intelligent?

M: All depends in what way, what way you mean, in fighting he is

L: Doesn't really show, you can't really show that all of them are intelligent because by intelligent I mean they haven't all taken A-levels

With few characters on TV to whom black children can directly relate it is not surprising that this group despite their criticisms of many aspects of the programme in other sections of the discussion (its unreality, unbending format etc.) are keen to establish B.A. as an authentic hero, relating his character on-screen (tough though fair etc.) to his off-screen personality. There is an obvious interest in first seeking out such information which is then used to confirm and celebrate salient features. Thus he really is a hero and a tough guy because he 'got' the muggers who sinisterly 'you never see them again'. Also he is seen to be fair to his daughter in his wish not to spoil her. In this particular anecdote I feel there is a discourse about how American

blacks should grow up. 'Where he was brought up' strongly implies the mythologised ghetto where life in its true authentic state is suposed to be lived. This is in contrast to the rich (implicitly white) areas which might spoil her.

Finally the question about intelligence reveals another tension. Within the A-Team itself, B.A. is clearly not the brains. His function is as driver and mechanic but not wishing to admit this potentially undervalued role the boys offer two other viewpoints - that he is intelligent in fighting and thus not just a brainless punchbag and that the whole question of relating intelligence to A-levels is in itself problematic.

The 5th year white girls were also keen viewers of the A-Team but their view of B.A. was much clearer. There was for them no need to create such a developed concept of hero either on- or off-screen nor isthere any tension for them in the fact that B.A. isn't the brains of the outfit. That role is simply assigned to Hannibal Smith (George Peppard)- he simply wears the iconographic signs of authority. He's got grey hair, he smokes a cigar and he's white!

For them B.A.'s appeal is different:

D: He's got, I'm not kidding, he's got about 500 chains round his neck and about 60 earrings up here and bracelets all the way down the arms to the ankles, he's got rings on every finger and he's the muscle behind the lot, and he hasn't got any brains but he's got the muscle.
TB: Why do you say he hasn't got any brains?
D: Because it takes about him 20 minutes to figure anything out

This explanation is interestingly much more in keeping with the analyses presented by the (white) writers such as Hoggart who discuss the deliberately comic-book style of the programme. One of the girls sees B.A.'s jewellery as part of the whole joy of the programme which later she describes as a 'fantasy..that's the whole fun of it because it's so different from all the ordinary boring things.' Her need for authenticity is absent and so can enjoy the fantasy and absurd comic book stunts which litter the programme.

Similarly she is not concerned about a definition of B.A.'s intelligence. He is unproblematically the 'muscle' with no need for a reassessment of intelligence vis-a-vis A-levels or other definitions of the word. They refer to newspapers to authenticate

the deliberate fantasy elements of the programme while the black boys use newspaper sources for authentication of his wider hero status.

The interesting divergance between these two groups is the negotiation of a black man/hero within a predominantly white programme. My feeling is that for the white girls B.A., despite his hero/cult status, is ultimately confirming to the archetypal 'nigger' stereotype - that is the huge gorilla-type but with his heart in the right place (after all he loves children) albeit a more spphisticated version. After all he is a mechanical wizzard. What I find interesting is the process which the boys engaged in to attempt to merge their search for a dignified space in predominantly racist mass media output with a character taken from an archetypal populist rightwing American studio drama series which is patriotic, macho and anti-authoritarian.

Police drama and the female supercop

Police drama programmes such as Juliet Bravo, the Gentle Touch and Cagney and Lacey are particularly interesting sites for examining the audience/text relationship with reference to questions of gender in that in these programmes the traditional roles of women within 'cop' shows (as victim or absent altogether) are apparently being challenged. Whether this reflects a changing climate of social and sexual relations, or more cynically a way of commaninding a new and wider audience - in that more women might watch the series than otherwise would - is not the point for this paper. What is more relevant however is how the boys and girls within my study respond to this now established female crime show, and whether a potentially different discourse about sex roles and sexuality is being established rather than the dominant modes of adolescent masculinity and femininity.

The boys I spoke to almost all rejected the female version of the cop show, although having said that there were a variety of reason as to why the programmes were disliked. In fact some groups made the distinction between US and UK female cop shows. Discussing Cagney and Lacey one 5th year boy said:

> 'Now that's different, that's set in America and in America it's like that, you know, it's better than the Gentle Touch, I mean you actually see then pull out their gun once or twice in a show,

you know, but in this Gentle Touch I don't think this what's her name - Mandy Forbes - got a gun'

This boy is able to see not only that the 2 versions of female cops are different, but claims that the US version 'is real'. Perhaps there are a couple of reasons for this. Firstly there is his own expectation of the genre - that is action - which the American version is able to provide whereas the UK cop normally prevented by carrying a gun can only provide action with physical fighting. Secondly, a British female cop would seem to be doubly hampered in providing action - she , like her male colleague is unlikely to be issued with firearms and within a genre which is overtly 'realistic' might not convince an audience used to exclusively male violence seeing her slug it out with assorted criminals.

In fact it is the question of implausibility and the need for action which led most of the boys to reject these types of programmes. The following anecdote about the Gentle Touch is typical:

> 'In one episode she did go out and she was giving chase and....they pulled out the gun and then it was a man, and he's running and she's running behind him and she's got the cheek to turn round and say to him 'freeze stop, police' and he got a gun and she's telling him to stop, and she's hanging onto her handbag, running down the road and the man gotta gun and she says 'freeze it's the police' and all that rubbish when he could turn and and blow her away'.

Not only is the sight of an unarmed police officer chasing a gunman and asking him to stop absurd, but the fact that the police officer is female makes it even more ridiculous. The handbag is for this boy a self-evident reason for the episode's implausibility. Thus while some of the boys' groups are able to accept a limited version of the aggressive female crime-buster in a mythologised gun/violent society like America, any equivalent intervention within the world of the British TV cop is quickly rejected. The sexism of this has a neat 2 edged quality to it. Firstly, women are excluded from the fictional world of UK police drama because they are deemed to be weak, secondly any attempt by a woman to assert herself within this world can be disregarded either because it is inherently laughable, implausible or plain boring.

For the girls who had a different range of concerns and positions these programmes are the site for a different kind of struggle. Most importantly for them the women in the police series are locked into a male world <u>on male terms</u>. This manifested itself in a

number of ways. Firstly the programme was seen to be created by and for men and that any woman appearing in was quite literally forced to accept what men told her to do.

One girl tried to problematise the concept of toughness itself. In discussing Gentle Touch she said:

> 'I'm not saying that women aren't tough but I mean the way Jill Gascoigne goes on it I don't really think, I don't think you'd find a police woman like that really, I think they will be, I don't know, they'd probably be a bit different, but I don't think they'd be like her'

The difficulty here seems to be the re-presentation of a female character through a male producer/script-writer making the character inauthentic. 'Not that women arent tough' but that toughness she perceives in the Gentle Touch character is one which is framed within a male version of toughness and not a framework which satisfies or explains her own concept of toughness (she doesn't articulate one)

In fact in conclusion the girl is forced to admit that, within these heavily prescribed limits of what constitutes TV cop action a woman does not fit, not because she is innately unable to cope but because the present construction and development of the genre does not seem to offer a real place for women - TV places them authentically in other spheres and in other roles. As she says:

> 'the way she goes on they might as well get a man to do it anyway cos it's like it's still sominated by men cos she is, it is as if she is a man in it, more or less'.

Beneath these rejections from both boys and girls lies a struggle for meaning and control. The rejection for the boys reinforce their own sexism - that women can't play these roles - and that the only way they can is when the fictional world is clearly inauthentic or just plain boring. The girls' rejection is a more complex affair. There seems to be a complex tension between disappointment at continuously witnessing female characters acting on male terms and an inability to create an authentic space for the 'tough woman' with the result that these roles might as well go to men. Their own rejection of and exclusion from this sphere is confirmed and they therefore might as well look to other aspects of TV to colonise.

c) In this final section I want to discuss the educational relevance and importance of this study in terms of how questions of audience, and in particular the aspects of the text/audience(s) interaction which the Brent children's comments suggested should influence us as teachers. To do this I will cover 2 main areas: firstly, the reasons why questions of audience are becoming increasingly important within Media Education; secondly the relevance to both general educational theory and specific classroom practice of the differentiated audience.

The importance of audience within Media Education

It is certainly true to say that in the past questions of audience within Media Education have been largely ignored. As suggested in the opening section and by the children's comments audience response has been popularly regardedin terms of direct effects, and research has attempted - usually unsuccessfully - to measure the particular effect of particular artefacts on particular groups of people. Within academic circles the audience has been rarely afforded even this status. The literary critical tradition from which a great deal of Film Theory and Film Studies sprang tended to focus almost exclusively on the intention of the author, and to ignore the context in which a particular text is produced and read. (By context I refer to the socio-economic circumstances in which a particular product is set - such as institutional values and practices, factors encouraging the delivery of specific audiences and the actual reading of texts).

What we have seen in the past few years is a re-assessment of the balance between text/author and audience, and a realization that meaning is produced not by one or the other but by the interaction of the two. The move from 'pure' Film Studies to Media Studies which examines a wider range of popular cultural products actually problematises the notion of author - it is clearly absurd to discuss the authorship of the A-Team or Hill Street Blues . The more important questions deal with a production team's traditions and their assumptions about audience as well as the nature of international TV programme sales.

There are a number of reasons for the re-examination and subsequent assertion of the importance of audience in Media Education.

Firstly one must look to the lessons learnt from the progressivism movement of the 1960s and 1970s. This tried to 'popularise' education by making its content and its delivery more relevant to the needs of pupils. In particular this meant the introduction of topics which were more clearly based in and around pupils' experience and concerns using a pedagogy which attempted to redistribute power with the classroom by breaking with the 'teacher-as-expert' position. However despite its good intentions the tendency was often to introduce 'new' topics such as film studies or the press but to concentrate on a different type of cinematic or newspaper experience than that with which the pupils engaged. The implications of this, like a great deal of their other school activities appeared to deny or undervalue the pupils' own popular culture.

Another major factor was the realisation that meaning is not inherently based in a text, but is produced by the active interaction of text and reader, an interaction which as the Brent children's comments amply demonstrate is neither static nor uniform. The meanings which may emerge from a text, in addition to the type of texts chosen to be 'read' are derived from complex sets of interactions. Not only is the reader likely to occupy a number of different positions dependent upon factors of gender, age, ethnic origin, social class etc which are all likely to have some crucial influence upon a person's popular cultural diet and sets of meanings, but the text itself via its internal structures and its method of delivery and address to audience(s) is also a crucial factor. For example, a TV schedule clearly has a particular view about the types of audiences it can deliver at various times of the day/week by the kinds of programmes it broadcasts. Furthermore as viewers of these specific types of programmes we are offered particular positions to inhabit. Masterman describes this positioning in the following way:

> 'First of all, within the visual media we, as audience members, are compelled to occupy a particular <u>physical</u> position by virtue of the positioning of the camera..... A <u>social</u> space is also opened up for us by the text's mode of address, its setting and its format. Finally .....we are invited to occupy...<u>ideological</u> positions - 'natural' ways of looking at and making sense of experience'.
> (Masterman, Teaching the Media, Comedia, 1985 p.229)

What we can now see is the essential but still largely potential tension between text and audience over meaning. On the one hand, as Masterman points out texts are encouraging audiences to make sense

of them in specific ways, not necessarily all of them intentionally made by the producers; on the other hand we have the complex sets of beliefs and assumptions about experience (including texts) which readers bring to texts. The comments from the Brent children suggest that this tension though often felt is rarely clearly recognised, a situation which education generally does not recognise, let alone address. But it is within the complex interaction between text and reader that Media Education has a major contribution to make, and to which we now turn.

The relevance of the text/audience interaction for (Media) Education

This reassessment of the text/audience interaction has a number of far-reaching implications for education in general and Media Education in particular.

Firstly it raises a number of key questions about how texts attempt to position audiences and how audiences actually interact with texts, including how audiences respond to notions about themselves implicit within texts. These questions are equally relevant to 'non mass media' texts as they are to the A-Team or News at Ten. What educationalists need to move towards is an understanding that all texts - including educational texts - are not transparent carriers of information but usually and implicitly represent a 'hidden curriculum' of values and assumptions. Therefore although the seamless flow of images from, for example, ETV might give the impression of spontaniety and naturalism teachers need to help their pupils develop techniques to read such texts critically and to discern the values and discourses which might inform those texts.

This problematising of the text is of course only part of the story about the text/audience interaction. With the text we are offered particular - often dominant - sets of meanings which are often buried within a text's mode of address or its actual content. Equally crucial is the range of the readers' response for though an invitation is offered by a text it can be refused, variously negotiated or accepted. For pupils this might mean moving towards an understanding that texts are open to varied interpretations (including resistance), that such interpretations might not be dependent upon either ball-park considerations of age and sex (eg. teenagers like teenage orientated products) or idiosyncratic individual quirks

of taste z(eg, I like it because I like it) as well as a sense that texts are not 'god-given' creations immutable to human influence. Pupils might also find it illuminating to consider what the possible range of interpretations might be and to speculate about the significance of this. For example, one idea might be: a project in which pupils are asked to discover a range of responses about a programme, to ask questions about what viewers saw or thought they saw, and even about the ways in which viewers physically watched a programme.

The notions about the differentiated audience and the text/audience interaction do not just affect the approach to and choice of texts, and, in classroom project terms, specific audience research assignments important as they are. It also clearly has implications for the kind of pedagogies which might be most appropriate for a curriculum which recognises and explores questions about texts and audiences. To give one example, this means that one can no longer conceive of a text as having just one meaning which is one's duty as a teacher to teach. Rather it begins to suggest that a range of possible readings need to be considered in dealing with texts, that is, the meanings which the text itself might seem to be offering as well as the actual meanings generated by pupils. Clearly this has a number of immediate effects on the way in which one approaches the materials introduced into the classroom. It democratises the learning process in that pupils will have valid contributions and perspectives to offer on specific issues in a way in which the single interpretation of a text resists, and more importantly it begins to develop the skills in pupils necessary for them to become critical readers.